

First Impressions: What You See is What You'll Get

Audiences and readers tend to believe that what they see is a good predictor of what's ahead. Graphics create a complex set of expectations about a speaker and his or her message. Graphics choices hint at the speaker's competence, attitude toward the audience, and the content of the talk. They lead audiences to form expectations about how easy it will be to grasp the information, too. Sophisticated presenters can help audiences "tune in" to many persuasive themes by using software options strategically. An initial slide not only announces the title, it sets the tone for the presentation.

Tone in Graphics

Just as your voice can sound confident, friendly, bold, uncertain, or distant, your graphics can signal the same "tone" with visual—instead of audible—signals.

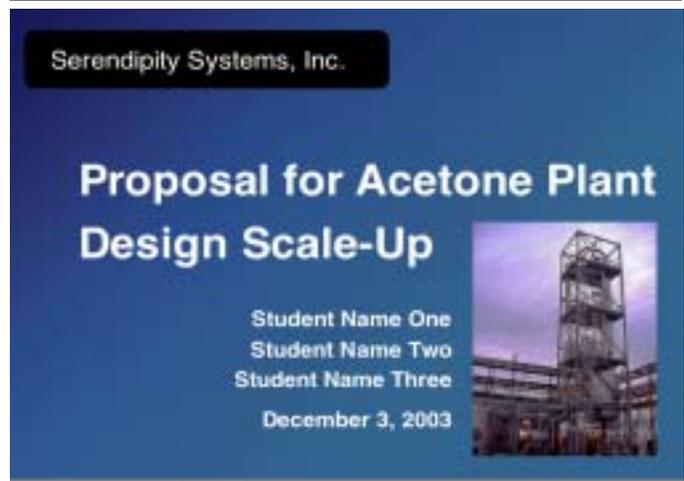
- **Fonts:** Dozens of fonts are available on most computers, but they connote different qualities. For technical talks in a fairly big room, your audience will be able to read easily a font that has a uniform shaft width (the letters don't "thin out" in the curves). Fonts such as Arial, Helvetica, and Verdana meet this test. Fonts with Serifs of "tails" are harder to read on screen.
- **Graphic Hierarchy:** The graphic hierarchy (large to small size) signals what you consider important. If your fictional company name is bigger than the title of your talk, guess which seems more important?
- **Blank Space:** If so much blank space surrounds elements that they don't form a whole that can be grasped at once, you won't be perceived as being in control of the argument and organization of the talk.
- **Color:** Colors, amazing and brilliant, can either reinforce the hierarchy and signal importance or confuse and clutter. To create legibility, the background and text colors must contrast sharply, and the accents that direct attention to specific areas or items should differ in intensity and hue.

All of these elements— typeface, size, color, and position – work together to set the tone, identifying you as a professional and confident to produce the best results.

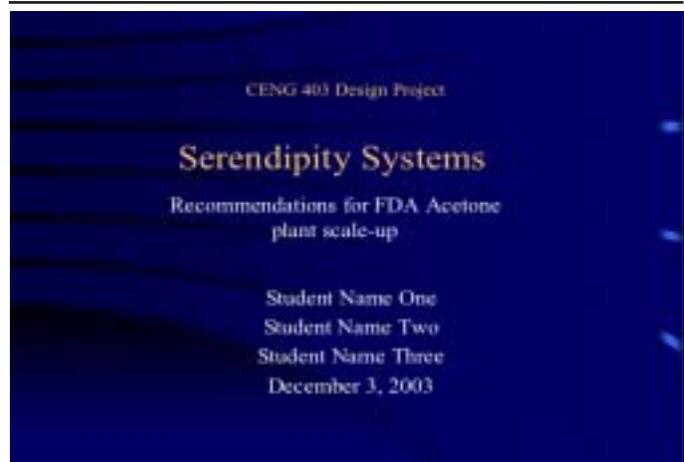
Consider the examples on the right as opening slides for student design reports. The slides contain the same "content" but differ in "tone." Which show you would prefer to see. What first impression do you have about the teams from Serendipity Systems that created them?



First impression: Whimsical, not professional. Cartoon image and Sand font lack stable base, look ragged, jumbled. Color of title links well to upward arrow, but overall effect is naive.



First impression: Bold and well organized. Arial font, mixed alignment. Uniform shaft width is legible. Title dominates slide, but alignment and grouping organize information around image of proposed plant. Design team's company title is clear but subordinate. The diagonal path leads your eyes.



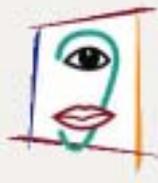
First impression: too timid. Times Roman font, centered alignment. Letters in the serif ("tailed") font "thin out" against dark background, causing letters to "break up." Company name should be smaller than presentation title (graphic hierarchy error).

First Impressions: At The Cain Project

Meet Picasso / Communicaso

Many people are intrigued by the Cain Project's logo, and they say they first read the design as a Modern Art image—perhaps by Miro, Matisse, or Picasso. Their first impressions are on target: We asked for a logo that suggested how communication constructs the working persona of the best scientists and engineers. When designer Karl Heim created “Picasso/Communicaso,” the president of Edge Texas, Steve Barnhill, set the charge. We liked Steve's words so much we adopted them along with Karl's human-but-technical figure.

When we look at Picasso/Communicaso, we see our goal of preparing students to lead through excellence in communication.



The Cain Project's logo symbolically embodies those facets of communication that are fundamental to science and engineering practice.

The shape of an attentive ear signifies the value of keeping an open mind while listening carefully and empathetically to others.

The eye depicts the power of graphic illustrations and pictorial elements to emphasize, summarize, and display relationships.

The speaker's lips suggest the force of eloquence, brevity, and clarity praised by commentators from ancient Athens to this day.

The colorful stylus represents the power of the written word (by pen or computer) in advancing ideas and influencing others.

Edge Texas can be reached at <http://ww.edgetexas.com>.

Happy Holidays From The Cain Project

VIGRE ONLINE Gets Tasty Reception

Approximately 60 faculty, post-docs, graduate students, and undergraduates from the NSF-funded program gathered October 5th for the unveiling of the new VIGRE ONLINE site. The site features linked research and learning spaces for each of the six Rice groups.



Its public side includes a library of articles and resources as well as recent conference posters created by participants. The Departments of Mathematics, Statistics, and Computational and Applied Mathematics are collaborating in the program. The Cain Project is responsible for communication instruction as well as a related research study of the groups' communication processes.

Suganya Ramadas, the web editor for the program, and Sharon Gibson-Mainka, instructional designer for the Cain Project, provided a demonstration of the site. They had computers set up for registration during and after the lunch. However, learning about how to register for and use the site wasn't the only attraction. Pizza in the four most popular combinations headed the menu and won plenty of focused consideration.

A tour of the site is available on the VIGRE ONLINE home page at <http://www.vigre.rice.edu>. Prospective undergraduate and graduate student participants are urged to take the tour. The pizza pans are empty now, but the site's still hot.

LPD's First Impressions: “Give Us More Sessions”

The Cain Project launched several successful Leadership and Professional Development workshops for graduate students this fall, including two new workshops on Data Presentation and on Writing for Publication. LPD workshops in the spring will feature workshops on the following topics:

- Chalk Talks & Lab Lectures
- Advanced Presentation Skills
- Poster Design I & II
- Data Presentation
- Writing for Publication
- Ethics

For information about LPD workshops visit:
<http://www.owl.net.rice.edu/~cainproj/lpd/index.html>